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A veteran US diplomat and vocal Israel critic named to a top intelligence post faced a probe into his financial ties Thursday, as lawmakers raised concerns about links to China and Saudi Arabia.

But US director of national intelligence Dennis Blair has served notice that he stands by Charles Freeman, a former ambassador to Riyadh and senior diplomat in Beijing, as his pick for chairman of the National Intelligence Council.

Blair "looks forward to Ambassador Freeman assuming his new role" once his vetting is complete, the director's spokeswoman, Wendy Morigi, said in a statement that flatly disputed some of the toughest charges.

Freeman would coordinate "national intelligence estimates," highly sensitive assessments for US presidents and other decisionmakers that reflect the view of all 16 US spy agencies on potential threats like Iran.

Blair's decision to name Freeman to the job last week drew cries of alarm from a bipartisan group of lawmakers strongly supportive of Israel, who pounced on his role as president of the Saudi-funded Middle East Policy Council think tank and urged a formal probe into "any potential conflicts of interest."

The group, led by Republican Representative Mark Kirk, urged the inspector general of Blair's office to look at Freeman's "past and current relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

On Thursday, the inspector general, Edward Maguire, wrote back that: "We are examining the matters you have raised and will respond upon completion."

At the same time, in a follow-up letter, Kirk and Democratic Representative Steve Israel urged Maguire Thursday to "pay particular attention" during his probe to Freeman's ties to a state-owned Chinese oil giant.

They noted that Freeman served on the board of the Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC), which has done business with Iran.

"Ambassador Freeman's service on the Board of Directors of a company owned by a foreign government seems to constitute an obvious conflict of interest -- especially given his service to a company owned by the People's Republic of China with significant investment in the Islamic Republic of Iran," they said.

But Freeman resigned from CNOOC's board February 1 and "made it clear to CNOOC from the outset that as a US citizen he could not deal with any Iranian issues, period," said Morigi.

Blair "welcomes" Maguire's probe, she said, because "in addition to the security clearance process and public financial disclosures, Director Blair believes that the IG report will put to rest any questions about Ambassador Freeman's suitability, character and financial history."

"Blair selected Ambassador Freeman because he thought he was the best person for the job given his exceptional talent, experience, and ability to produce first rate assessment products," she said.